

## Notice of Independent Review Decision

### **DATE OF REVIEW:**

03/23/2010

### **IRO CASE #:**

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE**

02/16/2010; bilateral cervical epidural steroid injection (ESI) 62310, 77003, 99144 and 02/19/2010; ASC bilateral cervical ESI 62319, 77003, 99144.

### **A DESCRIPTION OF THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR EACH PHYSICIAN OR OTHER HEALTH CARE PROVIDER WHO REVIEWED THE DECISION**

Doctor of Osteopathy, Board Certified Anesthesiologist, Specializing in Pain Management

### **REVIEW OUTCOME**

Upon independent review the reviewer finds that the previous adverse determination/adverse determinations should be: **Upheld**

Provide a description of the review outcome that clearly states whether or not medical necessity exists for each of the health care services in dispute.

**The requested 02/16/2010; bilateral cervical epidural steroid injection (ESI) 62310, 77003, 99144 and 02/19/2010; Ambulatory Surgery Center (ASC) bilateral cervical ESI 62319, 77003, 99144 are not medically necessary.**

### **INFORMATION PROVIDED TO THE IRO FOR REVIEW**

- TDI/DIVISION OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION referral form
- 03/12/10 MCMC Referral
- 03/12/10 Treatment History of claimant, TMI
- 03/12/10 Medication History of claimant, TMI
- 03/12/10 letter from I, Network & Medical Operations, with attached response regarding disputed services
- 03/10/10 Notice To MCMC, LLC Of Case Assignment, DWC
- 03/10/10 Confirmation Of Receipt Of A Request For A Review, DWC
- 03/01/10 letter from LVN
- 03/2010 Request For A Review By An Independent Review Organization
- 02/21/10 letter from LVN
- 11/19/08, 12/19/08 Office/Outpatient Visits, M.D.
- 08/19/08 Follow-Up Visit, APRN-BC, and M.D., Spine & Orthopedic

- ODG Integrated Treatment/Disability Duration Guidelines for Neck and Upper Back (Acute & Chronic)

**PATIENT CLINICAL HISTORY [SUMMARY]:**

The injured individual is a female with date of injury xx/xx. The injured individual had a C4-7 fusion. The MRI of 03/2006 showed no disc pathology yet the injured individual had two epidural steroid injections (ESIs) in 2008. There is no physical exam (PE) to support either of these. She reported benefit in her arm pain but not her neck pain after the first but no benefit after the second. Dr. saw her in 12/2008 after the second and stated she had had no benefit from these so she needed a new MRI. This was done almost a year later and showed a bulge at C3/4. There is now a request for two more.

**ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF THE DECISION INCLUDE CLINICAL BASIS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS USED TO SUPPORT THE DECISION.**

The note of 12/2008 states "have not helped"; the injured individual had two by this time. There is no PE by Dr. to support this. Also, the MRI of 03/2006 showed "no disc pathology" per Dr. and the MRI of 11/2009 showed only a bulge but no herniation of nucleus pulposus (HNP) or nerve impingement. Clinically and historically the request fails to meet Official Disability Guidelines.

**A DESCRIPTION AND THE SOURCE OF THE SCREENING CRITERIA OR OTHER CLINICAL BASIS USED TO MAKE THE DECISION:****ODG- OFFICIAL DISABILITY GUIDELINES & TREATMENT GUIDELINES**

Official Disability Guidelines: Recommended as an option for treatment of radicular pain (defined as pain in dermatomal distribution with corroborative findings of radiculopathy). See specific criteria for use below. In a recent Cochrane review, there was one study that reported improvement in pain and function at four weeks and also one year in individuals with chronic neck pain with radiation. (Peloso-Cochrane, 2006) (Peloso, 2005) Other reviews have reported moderate short-term and long-term evidence of success in managing cervical radiculopathy with interlaminar ESIs. (Stav, 1993) (Castagnera, 1994) Some have also reported moderate evidence of management of cervical nerve root pain using a transforaminal approach. (Bush, 1996) (Cyteval, 2004) A recent retrospective review of interlaminar cervical ESIs found that approximately two-thirds of patients with symptomatic cervical radiculopathy from disc herniation were able to avoid surgery for up to 1 year with treatment. Success rate was improved with earlier injection (< 100 days from diagnosis). (Lin, 2006) There have been recent case reports of cerebellar infarct and brainstem herniation as well as spinal cord infarction after cervical transforaminal injection. (Beckman, 2006) (Ludwig, 2005) Quadriplegia with a cervical ESI at C6-7 has also been noted (Bose, 2005) and the American Society of Anesthesiologists Closed Claims Project database revealed 9 deaths or cases of brain injury after cervical ESI (1970-1999). (Fitzgibbon, 2004) These reports were in contrast to a retrospective review of 1,036 injections that showed that there were no catastrophic complications with the procedure. (Ma, 2005) The American Academy of Neurology recently concluded that epidural steroid injections may lead to an improvement in radicular lumbosacral pain between 2 and 6 weeks following the injection, but they do not affect impairment of function or the need for surgery and do not provide long-term pain relief beyond 3 months, and there is insufficient evidence to make any recommendation for the use of epidural steroid injections to treat radicular cervical pain. (Armon, 2007) There is evidence for short-term symptomatic improvement of radicular symptoms with epidural or selective root injections with

corticosteroids, but these treatments did not appear to decrease the rate of open surgery. (Haldeman, 2008) (Benyamin, 2009) See the Low Back Chapter for more information and references.

Criteria for the use of Epidural steroid injections, therapeutic:

Note: The purpose of ESI is to reduce pain and inflammation, thereby facilitating progress in more active treatment programs, and avoiding surgery, but this treatment alone offers no significant long-term functional benefit.

- (1) Radiculopathy must be documented by physical examination and corroborated by imaging studies and/or electrodiagnostic testing.
- (2) Initially unresponsive to conservative treatment (exercises, physical methods, NSAIDs and muscle relaxants).
- (3) Injections should be performed using fluoroscopy (live x-ray) for guidance
- (4) If used for diagnostic purposes, a maximum of two injections should be performed. A second block is not recommended if there is inadequate response to the first block. Diagnostic blocks should be at an interval of at least one to two weeks between injections.
- (5) No more than two nerve root levels should be injected using transforaminal blocks.
- (6) No more than one interlaminar level should be injected at one session.
- (7) In the therapeutic phase, repeat blocks should only be offered if there is at least 50% pain relief for six to eight weeks, with a general recommendation of no more than 4 blocks per region per year.
- (8) Repeat injections should be based on continued objective documented pain and function response.
- (9) Current research does not support a “series-of-three” injections in either the diagnostic or therapeutic phase. We recommend no more than 2 ESI injections.
- (10) It is currently not recommended to perform epidural blocks on the same day of treatment as facet blocks or stellate ganglion blocks or sympathetic blocks or trigger point injections as this may lead to improper diagnosis or unnecessary treatment.
- (11) Cervical and lumbar epidural steroid injection should not be performed on the same day.

Criteria for the use of Epidural steroid injections, diagnostic:

To determine the level of radicular pain, in cases where diagnostic imaging is ambiguous, including the examples below:

- (1) To help to evaluate a pain generator when physical signs and symptoms differ from that found on imaging studies;
- (2) To help to determine pain generators when there is evidence of multi-level nerve root compression;
- (3) To help to determine pain generators when clinical findings are suggestive of radiculopathy (e.g. dermatomal distribution) but imaging studies are inconclusive;
- (4) To help to identify the origin of pain in patients who have had previous spinal surgery.